



BIMAL BHIKKHU, Engaged Buddhist Monk, social worker, Human Rights and Peace activist was born in a Chakma family in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the undivided India. He had his education—from the Primary stage to the post-graduate level—in Chittagong and Dacca.

A man of, as a former Chakma Raja described him, "indefatigable energy, endeavour, diligence and dedication", Bimal Bhikkhu was, and still is the helmsman behind the foundation of a number of Humanitarian, Educational and Social Welfare Projects.

This book contains some of his PAPERS and LECTURES he had presented and delivered at the different international FORUMS around the world, including at the United Nations General Assembly in New York and Geneva.

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BIMAL BHIKKHU

IN QUEST OF PEACE

Bimal Bhikkhu

**World Chakma Conference
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*TO
THOSE WHO SACRIFICED
THEIR LIVES FOR
PEACE*

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A LOOK AT THE PAST

At the dawn of my youth, it was the thought of my own mental peace and self-salvation that emboldened me to choose the path of ordination in the Bouddha Sangha.

Then after a few years in 1971, I joined the Boalkhali Dashabal Boudha Raj Vihara, a Chakma Raj Vihara founded by the then Chakma Raja late Bhuban Mohan Roy. There, apart from self-study, I used to teach the Sramanas and other children.

On December 16, 1971 Bangladesh was formed with the exclusive help of India. We, the Tribal people in the CHT, like others, did dream of a free and prosperous society where the citizens are fully entitled to enjoy freedom of thoughts and expression, right to move freely and right to work for livelihood.

But it took less than a year for our sweet dreams to be shattered. In the pretext of finding out the Rajakar and Albodor agents hiding (!) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the so-called Mukti Bahini (Bangladesh Liberation Army) aimed their gun at the peace-loving, innocent Tribal people in the Hill areas. Destruction of the villages, atrocities on the local people and rape of the Tribal girls were the results of the search by the wily Army men.

Here is an unforgettable horrible incident. On some day of December, not far from my vihara (Monastery), I saw the Shantipur village being attacked by the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini and then they set it on fire. Still that dreadful picture appears before my eyes :

The entire village burning in fire producing crackling sound, groaning of the dying men, disorderly romping of the horrified villageers. And on the other hand the Army men were amusing at that pathetic scene with ghoulish and roaring laughter. In this way, alas ! a growing village was destroyed. Spots of blood were seen on the soil there even for a week.

Sixteen persons died on that day. Hirendra La Dewan was one of them. Poor Hirendra Lal, aged nearly forty five, was dumb.

Hirendra Lal Dewan was always accompanied with his mother, on that day too. Seeing his mother being tortured by the Army

men, Harendra Lal embraced her. The gunmen snatched away the son from his mother like vultures and then killed him. An innocent, dumb preson died an awful death ! Next day his mother narrated the incident with tearful eyes, an extremely doleful cry of an old mother. Since then such Army operations have been launched daily and occasionally in the Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. They made me restless like the stormy sea. I began to question myself : What am I doing ? Should I devote myself to the path of my own *nibbana* ? Is this enough ? Should I remain silent hearing my brethren wailing in agon ? My happiness but their misery ? No, I realised, this was not the proper way.

I was reminded of the five precepts (*Pancha Silas*) of Buddhism, especially the first one : 'Do not kill any living being.'

Neither kill any living being, nor allow others to commit the same crime. I pondered over the question of what should be done : which path to be chosen, self-salvation or service to the society ? Finally the lofty message of the Buddha (*for the welfare of many, for the happiness of many*), elevated me to the field of social service.

In my mission to work for peace and campaign for protection of Human Rights, I have always shunned the path of a politician, and will continue to do so. Non-violence is the only means through which, I have conviction, we can solve our problems. In the meantime in 1986 the Bangladesh Military attacked the PARBATYA CHATTAL BOUDDHA ANATHA ASHRAM (an orphanage) which was established by my preceptor (R. Teacher) Religious Teacher, in 1961. Thus at every step Human Rights have been violated in the CHT in Bangladesh.

When the entire Hill region was turned by the Army to be an area of torture ; the air filled with the agony of people's afflictions, the leaves of the trees fell down at the painful groaning of mothers for their sons; soil of the CHT was dyed with human blood and that flow of blood mingled with the water of Maini, Chengi, Kachalong and Karnafuli rivers, I failed to keep myself captivated in my Monastery. So I came out with the Mission to establish peace and happiness in our homeland.

Since then I have travelled many countries, exchanged views with the world leaders and NGOs, delivered lectures at the International Forums. Quite a large number of my friends have helped me in this regard. They have made arrangements for my trips and organised

Seminars for deliveries. I am grateful to them all and at the same time regret for not mentioning their names individually.

To speak frankly, I had no wish to bring out these speeches. But my beloved companion, Mr. K. D. Banik with his constant insistence and earnest efforts has undertaken this publication for circulation among our people.

Finally, I would once again recall with due gratitude our innumerable friends and well-wishers and International Voluntary Organisations in home and abroad, especially Mr. Pierre Marchand, Director of PARTAGE, France who have been extending us all sorts of help. My colleagues have also been continuously rendering us all sorts of assistance and co-operation in our drive to spread the message of Love, Peace and Universal Brotherhood and to find out the way for an amicable and acceptable solution to solving the long-standing problems causing untold sufferings and hardships to the Tribal people, largely the Chakmas, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

Bodhikaranya Vihara

Calcutta, April 1993

Bimal Bhikkhu

STOP GENOCIDE IN BANGLADESH

United Nations Economic And Social Council
Commission On Human Rights

Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and
Protection of Minorities, Geneva, Switzerland.

Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 3-7 August 1987

Madam Chair,

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak before your distinguished Working Group.

I am a Buddhist monk from the hills in the South East of Bangladesh—the Chittagong Hill Tracts—where half a million tribal people live. Unlike the rest of Bangladesh, the vast majority of these people are not Muslim, and differ linguistically, ethnically and culturally from the Bengali majority.

I belong to the Chakma tribe. In 1984 I became the Chairman of 'Parbatya Bouddha Sangha', a socio-religious non-government organisation working for the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

I would like to thank the Anti-Slavery Society, the oldest human rights group in the world, for generously arranging my visit here.

I come here because I feel that I have a responsibility as a man, and may be more as a Buddhist monk, to try to stop the human rights abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have witnessed many years of horrible atrocities and my people asked me to speak and to express their experiences, sufferings and hopes. Your Committee brings a ray of hope to all indigenous peoples throughout the world who face the threat of extinction.

I do not want to repeat what was already been published by different NGOs or has been brought before your subcommission since 1982 regarding the situation in the Hill Tracts. Nobody who lives in the Hill Tracts will deny these reports.

Since the Conference of the Working Group in 1985 the crisis in the CHT has deteriorated alarmingly. I would like to discuss the prevailing situation in the area so that the Working Group can respond to the needs of our people. I hope that the evidence

I shall give will enable the Working Group to persuade the Commission on Human Rights to send a rapporteur to Bangladesh as soon as possible to see the situation at first hand, and to intercede with the Bangladesh government to stop human rights violations.

The Bangladesh regime has deprived the tribal people of the high degree of autonomy which they enjoyed under the British, when the CHT was an excluded area and the rights of the tribal people were protected by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900.

According to the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs, nearly 200,000 tribal people—a third of the indigenous people of the Hill Tracts—have been killed by the military or by settlers. 250,000 settlers—landless Bengalis from the plains—have taken over much of the agricultural land in the Hill Tracts, particularly in the north. Thousands of our people have been driven from their houses and lands. The solution to the problem of the Bengali landless is not to take the land of tribal people by force and to kill us.

Already 50,000 Chakmas are refugees in India. I have visited the refugee camps in India where conditions are appalling. Even now another 15-20,000 refugees are prevented by the Bangladesh army.

I would like to give some sad and disturbing evidence to show that our human rights have continued to be ignored since your Working Party last met.

A. MASSACRES

1. Matiranga, Lakshmichari, Panchari and Khagrachari Massacres.

On 30th April 1986 and the following days, the Bangladesh armed forces and Bengali settlers invaded some 50 villages in Matiranga, Lakshmichari, Panchari and Kharachari Upazillas (sub-districts) where they looted and burnt tribal villages, destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples, raped and tortured and murdered. The survivors fled either to India or into the forests. On 18th May 1986, 250 of these Tripuri tribal villagers were fleeing to India. As they approached the border they were caught by the Bangladesh border security force, who assured them that

they would be treated nicely and re-settled. The soldiers marched them into a narrow valley between Taidong and Comillatilla. Then Bengali settlers armed with guns, knives and speas attacked the reguees. About 200 of them died on the spot and now Bengalis are being settled in the Tripuri tribal villages.

2. Dighinala Massacre.

The Bangladesh security forces and Bengali settlers attacked 35 villages in Dighinala Upazilla from 13 to 15 June 1986. About 250 tribal people, mostly old people, women and children died during this attack. On 13 June 1986, Bengali settlers, with the support of the Bangladesh armed forces, raided my orphanage at Boalkhali in Dighinala Upazilla. My orphanage housed some 300 orphans of 5 to 12 years old. More than 100 of them are missing since the raid. 154 orphans managed to escape to the Indian state of Tripura, where they have been given shelter in the refugee camps. Madame Danielle Mitterand, the wife of the French President, and the Director of Partage Avec Les Enfants Du Tiers Monde, Mr. Pierre Marchand, have kindly found foster homes in France for 72 of our orphans. But the Bangladesh government did not want to allow them to go to France because it feared that they would expose its genocidal activities in the CHT to the civilised world. Finally, after a year of delaying tactics, international opinion has forced the government to give permission for these orphans to go to France.

3. Ranjan Moni Karbari Para Massacre

At 2.00 am on 19 Dec. 1986, Capt. Shaheed and his soldiers from the army camp at Chongrachari in Merung Upazilla and the Bengali settlers attacked Ranjan Moni Karbari village. 20 tribal people were killed, 18 of them were women and children, including 2 babies. Another 16 people were seriously injured and left for dead. Mr. Mangal Sen Chakma, 45 years, son of Mr. Mogonya Chakma, his wife, Mrs Padma Renu Chakma, 38 years, and their children Kalabaran Chakma, 12 years. Barpedi Chakma, 7 years, and Medori Chakma, 2 years, were all murdered. Mr Anudhwaj Chakma, 35 years, son of Mr. Kuri Choga Chakma, was grievously injured but miraculously survived. His wife, Mrs. Milabo Chakma, 30 years, and his children Ranjan Chakma, 10 years, and a 4-month old baby boy were killed.

4. Bhagabantilla Massacre.

On March 1, 1987 over 100 Chakma refugees, mostly children and elderly people were encircled by soldiers of the Bangladesh task force and killed as they tried to escape across the Indian border. The following day many more refugees were killed by Bangali settlers.

B. Rape

Tribal women and girls are frequently abducted, raped and killed by the members of the Bangladesh armed forces and Bengali settlers. For example;

1. On 6 October 1986, Colonel Tofazzal Hossain abducted Chichima Tripura, 16 years., daughter of Mr. Bhagya Moni Tripura of Voga Mukh Rehabilitation area. He took her away to Bandarban town where he raped her for 7 days and made her pregnant.

2. On 13 November 1986, Captain M. A. Helal and his soldiers raided the Chongrachari Joutha Khamar in Mohal Chari Upazilla. They beat and tortured many villagers and raped many women including Mrs Pai Sanu Marma, 18 years, to Islam Mr. Amiya Tripura, 35 years, a village school teacher and son of Mr. Virendra Tripura.

The pattern of muder, rape and land seizure continues relentlessly in the Hill Tracts. The whole area is under military occupation and there is an army camp in nearly every village.

May I repeat that I believe that the UN Commission on Human Rights should intervene in this terrible situation as a matter of urgency. The Commission should send a rapporteur to witness the genocide of the tribal peoples that is taking place in the Hill Tracts and to persuade the Bangladesh government to stop these atrocities.

Finally I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for giving me the floor and for your patience. Thank you, Madam Chair, for your Compassion and help.

The Bridge Between The Chakmas And The French

At The Parliament House In Paris On The Occasion Of The Reception Of 72 Tribal Refugee Children From Chittagong Hill

*Tracts By Mr. Chavan Delmas
The President Of The National
Assembly Of France, December 20 1987*

Mr. President, Ladies And Gentlemen, Boys And Girls.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of you for giving me this opportunity to attend this auspicious gathering and address a few words to you.

It is impossible to express in any language how over-joyed I am to see 72 of our children safely over here in France, living happily with their wonderful foster families. These cheerful and smiling little faces tell me that they are not only loved by their new families, but also by the people of France. You can not imagine our pride is being welcomed here by the President of the National assembly of France himself.

The people of France are a people with a glorious history and record of often having stood on the side of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, on the side of the oppressed and not the oppressor. It was in this tradition that Madame Danielle Mitterrand and Monsieur Malhuret, the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs allowed me to share my concern with them about the terrible crisis facing our people, particularly the little ones. They listen patiently as I explain the suffering of our people at the hands of the Bangladesh Military, the Bengali settlers and the Government of Bangladesh in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

Between April and June 1986 after the massacre at Dighinala some 50,000 Tribal people including many children from the orphanage of Parbatya Chattal Bouddha Anath Ashram fled across the border into India to a precarious existence in the Refugee Camps in South Tripura, India.

When our French friends heard our story a small miracle began which has culminate in event that brings us together today.

There is little doubt in my mind that they have still been in the Camps in Tripura, many of these children would have been died by now.

It was not easy to bring them out. It took months and months of delicate diplomacy, the insistent clamour of the French Public, and many steps to get round the prolonged resistance of the Government of Bangladesdh and the complexities of Indian politics. But here they are, all 72 of them, thanks to your efforts, safe and secure, perhaps, for first time in their young lives.

This is the happy end of one story, but perhaps the beginning of another one. Our children, their new families, the many helpers who are here and the people of France are building a bridge of friendship with the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of my far away country, a bridge of love across about 11,000 kilometres between the richest and of the poorest places of the world.

My mind travels across the bridge now to the beleaguered people of the CHT, threatened with arbitrary killing and even genocide, herded into protected villages under military guard, in an area that is now completely sealed off from the outside world. No journalists, no foreigners, no human rights activist team has visited the area freely for 15 years. Here is no freedom of movement or of speech. Our ancient land rights have been taken away from us. Our temples are ruined. At any moment there may be another massacre of innocent villagers.

But I want to finish on hope not bitterness. Here 72 young lives, snatched by all our efforts from the jaws of disaster. Here they can look forward to a bright and secure future full of fun and hope, secure in the love of their foster families and their new foster country.

For all this we thank you very much indeed.

MISUSE OF FOREIGN AID IN BANGLADESH

Press conference at the auditorium of the Japanese Socialist Party, October 12, 1989

ARRANGED BY THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ENGAGED BUDDHISTS

Dear Friends,

I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to all of you in attendance today and to the members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Japan Conference for generously arranging our visit to Japan. We are Chakma Buddhists from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and have come to Japan to speak on and express the experiences, sufferings and hopes of the Tribal People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Despite the recent election and creation of the three District Councils of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the problems of the Tribal People are rapidly deteriorating. The creation of these Councils is nothing but another hostile act of the Bangladesh Government in its plan to totally exterminate the Tribal population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Bangladesh Government thus is continuing to carry out its systematic programme to wipe out the Tribal People from their hearths and homes.

As you may know, the ethnic identity, religious faith, language and cultural tradition of the Tribal People is quite different from that of the Bengali Muslims living in the plains. Because of this, the human rights and civil liberties of the Tribal People have been grossly violated. The Bangladesh Government have been using all sorts of genocidal tactics including the wholesale burning of Tribal villages, forcible eviction, relocation of the Tribals in concentration camps, looting, rape, torture, detention without trial, desecration and destruction of Buddhist Temples and other non-Muslim places of worship, forcible conversion to Islam and mass killings.

Background

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a hilly region and stands as a separate district in the southeastern part of the present Bangladesh. The area of the CHT is 5,093 square mile and there are 12 groups of Tribal People with a population of about 700,000 people.

Historically, the Tribal People have lived politically independent lives and have never been ruled by any State or Kingdom. In 1860 the CHT was annexed by the British Empire and integrated into Bengal for administrative purpose only. The Tribal People, however, have nothing in common with population of the Bengalis in the plains.

In 1900, the British Administration promulgated the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation which restricted the settlement of non-Tribals and non-local population in the CHT. Furthermore, according to Rule 51 of the 1900 Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, any outsider found guilty of any activity prejudicial to the interest of the Tribal People shall be expelled from the CHT.

Today, more than half a million non-tribal Muslims have infiltrated the CHT, in order to legalize this invasion, the Bangladesh Government enacted legislation on February 26, 1989 to repeal the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900. On the same day the Government passed the Districts Council law. This has not only made the illegal Bengali Muslim settlers eligible to vote in the CHT District Council Election, but it also reserved 30 seats out of 90 in the District for the settlers. The 1900 CHT Regulation, however, neither allows any non-Tribal the right to settle in the traditional homeland of the Tribal People nor the right to vote in the CHT. The settlers have no legal right to settle and live in CHT, and moreover, are committing the genocide of the Tribal People.

The Council have no say in the affairs of the CHT. The Councils have neither legislative power nor executive power. It can be dissolved at any time by the Bangladesh Government. The Councils have no power either to formulate budget nor to plan any development project without obtaining the prior approval of the Government. It also can not levy taxes without the consent of the Government and it has been given only insignificant responsibilities such as primary education, primary health care, welcoming special guests, observance of National Days and so forth. The Councils are thus essentially powerless.

The Councils have no control over the Reserve and Protected Forests, the Kaptai Hydro electric Project and the Lake Area, nor the Industrialized areas of the CHT. This means that the Tribal People have lost control over areas equal to 90% of their homelnd.

The council can employ only class III and class IV personnel. The overall policy of the Council is controlled by the Government

through Government appointed Executive officers. The Council thus has no executive power at all and is nothing but a rubber stamp of the Bangladesh Government.

The Government has recommended 1) a 10% equal reservation of the Tribals in all Government Contracts in the CHT, 2) a 10% quota reservation of the Tribals for employment as labour in all local development works in the CHT. According to this Government order 90% of council's jobs will be filled by the illegal Muslim Settlers. Likewise the Districts Police Forces will consist of 90% non-Tribal illegal Muslim intruders. All this jobs should go to the Tribal People according to the 1900 CHT Regulation.

The councils have no power to appoint police personnel higher than rank of Assistant sub-Inspector. In word and practice, the District Council law has deprived the CHT Tribal People of both official and police protection. It is nothing but a blueprint of the Bangladesh Government to completely annihilate the Tribal People to open on the Tribal Homeland for Muslims.

For his reason, the CHT Tribal People rejected the District Council law. In return, the Bangladesh Government terrorized the CHT to force the Tribals to accept the District Council Law. From the time of the June 25, 1989 Disdtict Council Election until August 1989, the Bangladesh Security Forces in league with the illegal Muslim Settlers killed about 200 Tribals in CHT villages. The villages of Manic Chari, Khagrachari, Nanyachar, Burighat and Jurachari were raided. Now the Bangladesh Government is planning to send the Tribals to concentration camps and has already increased chekposts on the roads and water ways to harass the Tribals. There are 8 checkposts on the 14 mile Chittagong-Rangamati Road.

The Tribal, unable to live in their ancestral homes, have fled to India to save their lives. At present 90,000 refugees have taken shelter in 6 refugee camps in the Tripura State in India . Their living conditoins are appalling.

Development policy

Development has been the keyword for the Bangladesh Government. To the Bengalis, development has meant the aquistion of the natural and human resources of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. To the Tribal People, however, development has meant the deprivation of communally owned resource, exploitation of their lands, eviction from their homeland and finally, genocide.

Let us consider the Kaptai Hydrolectric Project. This dam was built in 1964 to secure a constant energy supply for the residential areas and the port of Chittagong. The dam resulted in the submersion of 50,000 acres of cultivable land in CHT under water. This is fully 40% of all the Cultivable land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. One hundred thousand Tribals were displaced and 45,000 migrated to India where they have neither citizenship nor refugee status.

Other development projects which did not benefit the CHT Tribal People include the 1) Karnafully Paper Mills, 2) Karnafully Rayon and Chemicals Factory. 3) Pilot Scheme for Jhum control and 4) Horticulture Development Pogramme.

International Development Aid

As one of the poorest countries in the World, Bangladesh depends heavily on foreign aid to carry out its development programmes. Foreign aid has been used to implement a number of programmes which are unfavourable for the existence of the Tribal people.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board was created in 1976 in the name of development of the economic conditions of the Tribal People in the CHT. In actuality, it destroyed the Tribal economy and supported the illegal settlement of Bengali Muslims in the CHT.

The United Nations UNICEF organization sponsored a drinking water supply programme in the CHT. This progamme, however, benefited only the army camps and Bengali Muslim colonies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The world Health Organization (WHO) organized a malaria eradication programme which also protected only army personnel and non-Tribal settlers.

The Asian Development Bank financed the Livestock and Fisheries Project which benefited only the illegal Bengali Muslim settlers. The Asian Development Bank also financed the Youth Khamer Project which is called a concentration camp by the Tribals.

The Telecommunication, Electrification and Tourism Development Programmes have all been used to benefit the Security Forces and the illegal Bengali Muslim intruders in the CHT.

The end result of all of these so-called development Programmes has been to encourage the Bengali Muslims to settle in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to promote the destruction of the Tribal economy, and to evict the Tribals from their traditional homeland.

Population Migration

At the time of the partition of India in 1947, the Tribals accounted for 98% of the total population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. After 1947, a large number of non-Tribal Bengali Muslims migrated to the CHT with the coordinated support of the State Authority. The non-Tribals constituted about 9% in 1951, 17.7% in 1961, and 27.5% in 1980. From 1975 to 1981, the total population of the CHT grew 46.85% compared to a growth rate of only 21.81% for total population of Bangladesh. These figures indicated the extremely fast growth rates in the CHT during this time due to the influx of illegal Bengali Muslims.

The continuous and planned influx of Bengali Muslims in the CHT has aggravated the miseries of the Tribal People. These Bengali Muslim from the plains have settled in the CHT in phase after phase.

Phase year Settled in the CHT

Phase 1 :1980 25,000 Muslim Bengali families

Phase 2 : 1981 1000,000 Muslim Bengali families

Phase 3 : 1982 250,000 Muslim Bengali families

Compounding the crists of the large influx of non-Tribals, the limited land resources is also a major problem of the CHT. The region is hilly and one third of the CHT is set aside as forest. As 40% of the arable land was flooded by the Kaptai Lake after the dam was built, the land shortage in the area has become just as acute as in the plains of central Bangladesh.

Besides these, Naval and Air Force personnel are stationed in the CHT to assist the Armed Forces when needed. With one Security Force for each six Tribals, the Chittagong Hill Tracts is nothing but a hange military camp. It is closed to foreigners and journalists.

Islamization

A large sum of money from Saudi Arabia has been channelled into the CHT to finance the construction of Mosques and

Madrashs (Islamic School) and for forcible conversion of the Tribals to Islam.

The new educational policy adopted by the Bangladesh Government introduced the teaching of Arabic in Primary School. The activities of the Islamic Centre and Islamic Foundation in the CHT are not only tools for the Islamization of the Trabals but also serve to strengthen Dhaka's control over the CHT.

The Tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are helpless in the face of this invasion. We desperately need the protection of the rest of the world, since Bangladesh does not speak the language of justice, rapidly in Bangladesh. In these hostile cirsumstances, the Tribal People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts will not survive unless the International community comes forward to protect us

I would like to appeal to all democratic Governments in the world, especially to the benign Government of Japan, to come forward to protect the Tribal People of the CHT by taking the following measures to put pressure on the Bangladesh Government :

1. Put pressure on the Government of Bangladesh to stop killings and atrocities against the Tribal People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as well as to restore human rights in the CHT by blocking economic aid.
2. Send a special team consisting of members of Parliament, religious leaders and representatives from human rights Organizations to investigate the real situation of human rights violations in the CHT committed by the Government of Bangladesh.
3. Compel the Government of Bangladesh to bring back 90,000 Tribal Refugees from India and rehabilitate them on their own lands under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and expel all the illegal non-Tribal Bengali Muslim settlers from the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Thank you very much for listening to my appeal to help the innocent Tribal People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

May all beings be happy.

CHITTAGONG HILLS TRACTS

PAPER presented at the 4th INEB conference in Bangkok,
February 21, 1992.

Human Rights Violations and Their Impact in The Region

Gross human rights violations are still continuing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Extra-judicial executions and tortures perpetrated on the non-combatant Tribal People in the CHT by the security Forces of Bangladesh are common in the daily routine.

Large scale incidents are still taking place in the CHT. Tribals are being killed, tortured, raped, injured and arrested. Burning the villages and looting their belongings are reported frequently. Thousands of Tribal people have been driven from their house and lands. Bangladesh security forces and Bengali Muslims settlers in clubs have killed perhaps more than 200,000 people in the CHT since the formation of Bangladesh. In short successive Governments of Bangladesh have been carrying out the genocidal policy for total extermination of the Tribal People from their homeland to occupy the land of CHT. As a result the influx of refugees to India is still continuing because there is no security for them in the CHT.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is the homeland of 12 Tribes comprising about 700,000 people. It is situated at the southeastern part of Bangladesh, covering 5,093 square miles (10% of the country). The largest group of population is Chakma. The Chakma, the Marma and the Tongchanya are Budhists, the Tripura are Hindu and other small groups are Christian.

In 1860, the CHT was annexed by the British Empire and administration was separated from the plain by the 1900 Regulation Acts for limiting migration of the people from the plain land.

Though CHT was a 98% Tribal non-Muslim populated area, unfortunately in 1947 it became the part of the then east Pakistan. So, to drive out the non-Muslim Tibals from CHT, the Government built a massive Hidro electric Dam at Kaptai in 1957-1963 which flooded 54,000 acres of cultivable land ; 100,000 people were displaced. Though a few received nominal compensation, thousands of them fled to India. Still 60-70,000 Chakmas remain in Arunachal Pradesh without any nationality.

After liberation the successive Governments of Bangladesh have not changed the Tribals-driven out policy, rather it has become worse. Since 1979 the Bangladesh Government has encouraged a large number of Bengali Muslims to settle into CHT and about more than 400,000 Bengali Muslims have settled in the CHT since 1979.

To occupy the Tribal land the Government has deployed at least 120,000 military and para-military security forces. Now, CHT is nothing but a big military camp. The Government of Bangladesh has sponsored the inhuman torture and killing of Tribal villagers, raping the women and teenagers by the security forces in a club with illegal Bengali Muslims settlers. The Tribal people are forced to move from their ancestral homes and land to cluster villages (Tribal people call these Concentration Camps) based near military camps.

The army controls all major aspects of civilian life. They even control the supply of daily essential commodities like rice, salt, kerosene and life saving drugs. As a result an artificial famine has been created in the region. At least 25 people from Baghai Chari and Barkal village have died without food since August of 1991. To save their lives from such inhuman torturing and atrocities a large number of people have been compelled to leave their villages and take shelter in the jungle. Some 50-60,000 Tribal people have fled to India and they are still living at the 6 Relief Camps in the Indian state of Tripura.

On 26 February 1989, the so-called Parliament of Bangladesh passed a new District Council Bill. The claim was that it would bring autonomy to the CHT; however, the paltry power of the District Council with regard to import issues such as land rights and their establishment by force have greatly discredited their claims as autonomous bodies.

In December 1990, the removal of military leader General H.M. Ershed from power raised hope in the minds of the people of CHT that the new Democratic Government would solve the problem of CHT by political means.

Democracy has been resorted in Bangladesh through Parliamentary election held on 27th February 1991. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party won the election and Begum Khalida Zia came in power.

Since the fall of Ershad regime all District Councils in Bangladesh have been suspended except for the three District Councils of CHT. These District Councils were created in 1989 under procedures implemented by force and were widely criticised by the people in home and abroad.

The Government led by Khalida Zia claimed to be democratic and took steps to restore democracy all over the country, except in CHT. All "Black Acts" promulgated by the Government of Ershad were repealed but these are still existing in CHT. The Khalida Zia Government did not withdraw the military and paramilitary forces from the CHT and the illegal Bengali Muslim immigrants were not taken back from the Hill Tracts Region.

Behind the Development policy of Bangladesh there is the slogan "We have to destroy the tribals in order to develop them". Once upon a time the Chittagong Hill Tracts were not only rich in timber and bamboo but also produced surplus paddy, cotton and vegetables. Hard working farmers were comparatively well off, and needy people were few in number. Now -a- days after millions of dollars of development aid have been spent needy people abound with rice, yet vegetable and cotton have to be imported and timber and bamboo have become so scarce that the formerly magnificent houses of the Chakmas and other Tribes have given way to poor huts.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Board (CHTDB) was created in 1976 for the upliftment of the socio- economic condition of the Tribal people of CHT. In fact, it has been destroying the socio-economic condition and supporting the illegal settlement of Bengali Muslims on Tribal land in the CHT. The chairman of CHTDB is the highest military Commander, the G.O.C., of Chittagong .Without his approval no development scheme can be implemented in the CHT, even a tribal student cannot be admitted to higher studies. So he, (GOC), can easily misguide development in CHT. No wonder then that most of the money for development programmes is spent for the purpose of military oppression in the Hill Tracts.

In spite of being one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh appears to make intense militarisation of CHT a priority, adding further to its already overwhelming problem.

For Tribal people, development means ever bigger buildings in the administrative centres, while their houses remain even smaller due to the destruction of the local natural resources.

In the name of development the law enforcement personnel of Bangladesh have sought to force tribal villagers to move from dispersed villages into protected villages close to security forces camps. Villages of this type have been known by different names at different times, protected villages, collective villages, and more recently cluster villages. The relocation of the population in these villages, often presented by the authorities as being in the interest of the area.

There are 60 cluster villages only in Khagrachari District for the Tribal People. The cluster villages are nothing but concentration camp. The movement of the villagers is restricted by the Army personnel. The villagers live predominantly from Government hand outs of food and provisions such as rice every few weeks.

The Governments provides them rations only for a few months. Afterwards the tribal people are encouraged to work as daily labour. So it is not difficult to understand how this development programme is turning the Tribal People from village farmer into dependent bonded laborer for plantations of rubber and teak, sponsored by investors such as the Asian Development Bank.

The military personnel deployed in CHT have been using the forest for their personal interest. They indulge in the destruction of forests, make business with the timber and use the property for their future generation. Even the stones from the area of CHT are being robbed to the other parts of Bangladesh. The Food For Work Programme aided by US AID under supervision is being used in clearing the jungles and groves of nearby villages and roads. With the help of the US AID, green is being banished from the CHT, although the US Administration, I am confirmed, has no sanction in this destructive programme.

These unwise and destructive measures by the Bangladesh Military personnel are paving the way for the following :

1. Soil Erosion.
2. Ecological imbalance which leads to insufficient rainfalls and thereby resulting in the creation of a desert in the CHT.

This ecological imbalance being widened continuously, is not only harmful to the environment in Chittagong Hill Tracts but to the whole region of Bangladesh and the world as a whole.

Before concluding, I would like to appeal to peace-loving people, NGOs who are active for human rights and humanitarian work and democratic Governments :

1. To save the lives of the Tribals from serious starvation, an artificial famine created in the CHT Region due to increased control over food rationing in the cluster villages by armed forces. Demand that aid agencies and NGOs be able to extend their development programs into CHT directly instead of handing over development funds to the Governments of Bangladesh.
2. To return the Bengali settlers back to their places with the possible support of development aid funds.
3. To immediately demilitarize the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to restore democracy.
4. To ensure rights of self-determination of the Tribal People in Chittagong Hill Tracts.
5. To help to create a healthy environment so that the refugees can be repatriated and rehabilitated honourably to their respective lands.
6. To enable scholars, scientists and observers to extend their help in studying ecological conditions in CHT, thereby protecting the region from imminent doom.

SAVE THE CHAKMAS FROM EXTINCTION

At The National Meeting Of Buddhist Peace Fellowship At Burlington, Vermont, U. S. A. On 10 October 1992

Dear friends,

I believe you are all familiar with the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. Basically, the government's policy has not changed since the nineteen sixties. To sum it up in a few words :

"We want the land but not the people"

Before, the **Strategy** was straightforward deportation or slaughter. But this brought limited criticism from international public opinion. Today the **Policy** is the same but a new **Clean Strategy** has emerged.

Today, the persecution and the killing goes on, but the new method is by "relocation programmes", forcing the tribals to live under military control in "cluster villages," and by "pacification programmes" whereby all basic necessities including food and medicine are rationed by the military administration. All buying and selling is subject to military approval. So grass root village economics have been deliberately **Destroyed** by land seizure, prohibition of cultivation, military control of markets, health centres, schools and trade to a point that the tribals are dying of starvation and sickness, or fleeing their homeland to avoid death. The **Net Result** of the past twenty five years of persecution is the **Genocide** of the Tribal population.

On countless occasions, and on different pretexts, the Bangladesh Government, in league with the Military, Para-Military, and sections of the Bengali population have been implementing an **OPERATION OF GENOCIDE** by committing all sorts of crimes against the Tribals in their homelands.

In the sixties, The Kaptai Hydro Electric Project uprooted more than one hundred thousand Tribal people by flooding a large area of the agricultural valleys in the tribal homelands. Compensation and rehabilitation were simply eye-wash, incomplete and practically nonexistent. The fact is now not even disputed now by the Bangladesh Civil and Military officials, but what have they done?

This project was designed to benefit other sectors of the national population and not the Tribal people living in the project area. The Kaptai Dam was to supply Power to the plains areas of Bangladesh, particularly the capital city of Dhaka and not to the Tribals, who would simply bear the social and economic cost.

The policy of Genocide and extemmination differs in methods and tactics according to the circumstances that suit the government and the vested interests of the military. The authorities have become masters in Public relations and Press Manipulation. They control the national media and have imposed **A Blackout** on the International Press. You can get a reporter into Sarajevo or even to Bhagdad but no foreigner gets into the Hill tracts. You can massacre a thousand people in Bangladesh and it doesn't even make the evening news, nor even the footnotes in American newspapers. There's no video tape. The Bangladesh authorities can censure and manipulate any situation to their benefit and even make themselves appear as the innocent victims of dangerous insurgents.

Despite their desire to keep the killings under covers, records of **Human Rights** violations during the last 12 months show 663 cases from July to December 1991 and 665 from January to July 1992. These violations, committed by the military authorities, or by Bengali settlers with military protection, include robbery, arson, beating, public torture, rape, religious persecution, arbitrary arrest, detention, eviction, relocation to concentration camps, murder and mass killings. What else remains? On several occasions, after shooting the male tribals to death, the military have stood by as the settlers have forced hundreds of Tribals-old men and women and children into their bamboo huts, setting fire to such houses and killing them by burning them alive. The children who tried to escape have been recaptured and thrown into the flames. Dead bodies of feeding mothers have also been found. The injured, the dead and the dying are buried together in mass-graves.

The most recent massacre occurred on 10th April 1992 in the cluster village of Logang where an estimated 1200 persons were killed. Accounts of this atrocity have been reported by almost all the Human Rights organisations such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the CHT Commission, Anti-Slavery International, Survival International and Amnesty International. *Excerpts of such reports, submissions, appeals etc. are available from me.*

These killings and military terrorism compelled the CHT Tribals to take shelter in the neighbouring states of India with the adverse result of putting 60,000 refugees in Tripura camps alone. Recently New Delhi has become keen on sending the Tribal refugees back to their homelands as early as possible. Much water has flown under bridges since the UN took up the problems of such refugees in different nations throughout the globe, and so many Conventions and Commissions and Covenants have been framed to protect these refugees, which are binding on Bangladesh as well as India. Mindful of such Conventions and policies, Human Rights Organisations like the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, the Anti-Slavery International, Amnesty International and the Survival International have asked New Delhi to take an "effective role" in persuading Dhaka to create a conducive atmosphere in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for repatriation.

I myself also made representations and appeals to Governments, NGOs and others on two main points.

Firstly, please stop this **GENOCIDE** and extermination, I plead and beg with you. Secondly, please help to resettle the refugees, my people, in their respective homelands.

It is common to Bangladesh Governments, old and new, to describe the Tribals as uncivilised nomads, having no habit of permanent residence. But this is lies, lies, lies! Recent independent investigation has shown that the tribals possess land ownership titles that are valid under Bangladesh law. They hold the same kind of land documents as other citizens hold for their homes, orchards, paddy rice fields and even, sometimes, for swidden areas. As their land possession is legally established by valid documents their eviction by settlers is obviously illegal. Then there is communal land (forest, lake, rivers, valleys) that belongs to all the Tribals. Much of this land has been confiscated without any compensation. Now, the Bangladesh government wants to confiscate even the remainder (over 130,000 acres) in the name of so-called aforestation. This is also a policy of Bangladesh to evict the indigenous people from this ancestral home. As you can imagine, they need your help badly.

Survival International recently has urged the UN Commission on Human Rights "to take action to halt the gross Human Rights violations against the Tribal people and to demilitarise the CHT." Also, Survival International has urged the UN to call upon the Bangladesh Government to actively seek a political solution to the ethnic problem in the CHT that "Recognises and upholds the Tribal Rights to their own lands in Bangladesh". Bangladesh military is spending over 6.5 Billion Takas in the name of clearing forest in this Hill areas. We wish they spend a fraction of that for the development in the Tribal area.

I cannot but mention here that we are aware of the soft and sweet words of the Leaders of Bangladesh, but also painfully aware of the fact that the Tribal peoples continue to be the victims of a GENOCIDE which remain unabated. The Bangladesh Government should make an OFFICIAL GUARANTEE before the UN to stop attacks on the Tribal minorities and to take steps to enforce such a Guarantee. Procedures for these purposes should also be defined and strictly adhered to.

Endorsing the recommendations made by Amnesty International, I also appeal to all concerned for strict enforcement of Article 32 of the constitution of Bangladesh which implements the provisions under Article 6 (1) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights which states: "Every Human being has the inherent right to life. This shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life". Similarly, Principle 1 of the Principles for the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions lays down :- "Governments shall prohibit by law all extra-judicial, arbitrary and summary executions and shall ensure that any such executions are recognised as offences under their criminal laws, and are punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account the seriousness of the offences. Exceptional circumstances including a state of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency may not be involved as a justification of such executions. Such executions shall not be carried out under any circumstances."

My appeals are, in case of any extra-Judicial Execution in violation of the aforesaid provisions, UN should send its own

Inquiry Commission to investigate the matters following standard aims and working methods and to submit reports to the UN for necessary and appropriate action. Further, I shall also appeal to the UN and other relevant authorities to call on the Government of Bangladesh to ensure that all Law Enforcement Personnel are clearly instructed that lethal force may not be used except in genuine life-threatening circumstances and only as a last resort, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 1979 and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Fire Arms by Law Enforcement officials, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crimes and the Treatment of Offenders in September 1990.

Finally, I plead and beg to all concerned as well as to yourselves to raise your voices so that the lives of the remaining poor persecuted Tribals are not endangered again and those who are still in their beloved homeland are not pushed to extinction.

May all beings be happy.

A RESURRECTION OF HOPE

Statement To The General Assembly Of The United Nations

ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR
FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, 10th DECEMBER 1992

Mr. Chairman, Sisters and Brothers,

Please allow me to speak a few words in my own language : *Jau Bandhulak* (Greetings, dear friends).

Mui Bangladesh Parbatya Chattagramma Ekjon Chakma Boudha Bhikkhu (I am a buddhist Monk from the Chakma tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh). *Jou* (Thank You). My mother-tongue is really the only thing which has been left to me. I have already lost my land, my traditional way of life, my family and my friends . . .

Today, the 10th of December 1992, is finally a day which marks a Resurrection of Hope for millions of people designated as indigenous or tribal.

Let me present the situation of these people of Asia as I have seen it. Throughout Asia you will find indigenous and tribal people. Their lives have become a daily nightmare, an ocean of suffering. It is only the intensity which varies from one country to another, from one moment to another.

The problems have the same roots : non-respect for human beings and their rights. There is no respect for our culture, religions or traditions. The present situation of the indigenous and tribal peoples of Asia is not just a "problem" : it is a drama which dishonours the human condition, and changes must be made.

The situation has become so intolerable that there is increasing violence, provoking even more misery. But I have not come to complain nor to seek out the guilty. I have come to propose four actions to lessen suffering and to build peace :

A. The Right to Truth

It is only by having the true situation known that we will be able to transform it. I therefore ask that the Working Group on Indigenous Populations be made a permanent part of the human rights bodies of the United Nations.

The members of the Working Group should be able to travel freely to see the reality in our areas and to make their findings

public to the world's media as well as to the United Nations. Currently the truth of the situation is too often hidden. Our only force is truthful information.

Our lives are menaced because our situation is often unknown. Thus the Working Group should have offices in many countries so that indigenous people can contact them. We will then be able to live in harmony with all the world.

B. The Right of Land

Precise territory must be set out for indigenous and tribal people. We do not want to be a "museum for anthropologists" but we wish to be able to choose our style and speed of development. Thus the Working Group should encourage each parliament in Asia to guarantee through laws our right to land. The Working Group should monitor that these laws are respected.

Yet in our eyes, the most precious resource is the human person : we wish to see harmonious development of the human potential : Physical, intellectual, psychological and spiritual.

C. The Right to Life and to Justice

We must put an end to massacres and prevent armed conflicts. When there is killing or rape, the law must be respected and the accused brought to justice. The Working Group should encourage respect for law and its re-establishment when it has been weakened.

The "Impunity" of guilty parties is an insult to Justice and Dignity. In order to avoid armed conflicts, there should be training in active non-violence as taught and practised by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. We therefore ask that the Working Group organize such training, drawing upon such people as the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Adolfo Perez Esquivel and such specialized organizations as the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

D. The Rights Of The Child

You have had the wisdom to recognize the Rights of the Child by an international convention in 1989.

For indigenous people, our children are our only hope. I therefore ask that UNICEF help to implement the rights of the children of indigenous and tribal people—especially the right to education. Most of our children are currently deprived of this right, through lack of schools, teachers and equipment. I therefore ask UNESCO to mark 1993 by giving scholarships for

higher education to indigenous and tribal youth. If their potential is fully developed, these young people will help the whole of world society.

I also ask UNESCO to help preserve and enrich our culture and religions—our identity and way of life. We are all human beings, not superior or inferior. We have so many things to learn from others in the Human Community, and we can share our values. We have to realise that we inter-are¹ : what you do has an impact on us ; what we do has an impact on you. Our children are already carrying a very heavy burden : a financial "debt" to the richest countries. For me, this burden is really an injustice against those children.

CONCLUSIONS

We, Indigenous and tribal people, must also recognize our past mistakes. For instance, we have not fully respected the dignity and rights of the women in our communities. Through education, UNESCO must help to promote the rights of women in our societies.

We must also learn to renounce violence. We share a planet with other societies and we must learn to live together in harmony. We are different, but *not* enemies. Rather we have common enemies to fight together ignorance, fear, hatred and violence.

We can be mutually enriched by our differences. In Fact, it is the diversity which creates our richness. The path of reconciliation between our peoples must involve respect for justice.

There is no Way to Peace : Peace is the Way.

Thus the United Nations must promote a new human culture—that of non-violence based on the respect of the person, truth and the rule of law.

Thank you for your efforts to know us, to recognise us and understand us.

This cry of distress, by your help becomes today, this 10th of December, a cry of hope from by heart.

Sabbe Satta Sukhita Honitu, May All Beings Be Happy

1. From Buddhist term "Interbeing" which affirms that there are no separate selves. Everything "inter-is".